# LOS RANCHOS

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LAFAYETTE - ORINDA - MORAGA

HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Vol. I - No. 3 December, 1973 Box 103, Moraga, CA 94556


## LOS RANCHOS SAN PABLO y EL SOBRANTE

### -OUR NOVEMBER MEETING REPORT-

"My roots go deep into the soil of Contra Costa County," declared Mrs. Harriet Fitzgerald Wahlander, fifth generation Californio at the Nov.13 meeting. In 1776 Joaquin Isidro Castro came to California with the Anza party of colonists. His son, Francisco, was granted the Rancho San Pablo in 1823. He raised eleven children there, including Francisca who married Joaquin Moraga, and Victor and Juan Jose, owners of the El Sobrante Rancho.

Victor was the first founder of Orinda. His granddaughters, Jovita, and Victoria, were the mothers of three of the honorary members of the Orinda Historical Society, sisters Jovita Fitzgerald and Harriet Wahlander and their cousin Victor Brennan.

When Contra Costa County was created by legislative act of the state government at Benicia in 1852, Orinda was represented by Victor Castro on the first Board of Supervisors. He laid out the townsite of Orinda in 1888 and recorded it at the County. It included 42 blocks of homes with 8 streets and 7 alleys, a business section and a hotel site. It was large enough to accomodate the expected influx of population brought by the California and Nevada Railroad which terminated in Orinda in 1901.

In 1839 Victor Castro built an adobe near the boundary of his fathers Rancho San Pablo his own (p.2)

## A JANUARY SYMPOSIUM: CARPENTIER--

### ONE MAN WHO CHANGED OUR HISTORY

The life and influence of Horace Walpole Carpentier will be the subject of the societies' January 8th program to be held in the Choral Room of Campolindo High School at 8 p. m. (Park on the North side.)

It could be said that Carpentier's influence affected more of Lamorinda's acreage than did any other single agent in its history.

Not only was his impact felt in our area but in many others, as can be witnessed from the fact that the topic of this meeting was suggested by Mr. Roy Bloss, then president of the San Ramon Valley Historical Society, and that Mr. Leonard Verbarg, THE KNAVE of the Sunday Oakland Tribune, welcomed the opportunity to join in the January symposium.

Carpentier was the leader of the trio that squatted on Vicente Peralta's San Antonio Rancho and laid out the town of Contra Costa, later changed by him to the City of Oakland. His efforts on behalf of his city were so directed to his personal gain that its histories and its press recount more improbity during his regime than in those of his successors, and hence speak more disparagingly of him as a person. Joining the outcry were the rancheros and ranchers alike not only of the central Oakland and Berkeley areas, but of the inland San Ramon, Tice, Moraga, and Lafayette Valleys, the hills and canyons of El Sobrante.
(Participants listed on cover ad.)

ORINDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Editor: Carol Leland P. O. Box 82, Orinda 94563

## LOS RANCHOS SAN PABLO y EL SOBRANTE (Cont. from p. 1)

El Sobrante. 200 Indians built it with walls two to four feet thick. The foundation was of stone quarried in the El Cerrito Hill. This home was used for 117 years until gutted by a fire set by an arsonist. The site is now the El Cerrito Plaza Shopping Center. Victor Castro operated a ferry at Point Isabel to carry miners to the gold fields in 1849, and sold cattle and wheat for export. At his death he was eulogized by the San Francisco Chronicle as "The Last of the Spanish Grandees."

Mrs. Wahlander recalled her first visit to Orinda by horse and buggy to attend the wedding of her mother's youngest brother, Percy, at Santa Maria Church. She remembers the long procession of surreys winding down the Wildcat Canyon Road from North Berkeley, bringing wedding guests. She said that most of the land was lost by the Castro Heirs. Her most treasured possession is the ornamental brass key-hold plate from Don Victor's adobe, her inheritance from her great grandfather.

There were ten descendants of Don Victor Castro in the audience. These included Mrs. Wahlander and her son William; Victor Brennan and his children, Laurel Anne and Douglas; Herbert Brennan; Neil Clark; and Percy Castro's daughters, Dorothy Castro Murray of Livermore and Patricia Castro Ostarello and daughter Lisa of Salinas.

We are very grateful to Mrs. Wahlander for sharing her research and slides with us. She paid tribute to Louis Stein, O. H. S. honorary member, for his foresight in interviewing her relatives and preserving pictures for later generations.

## "KNOW YOUR ORINDA"

All fourth grade students in the six Orinda schools shared a unique program last week. O. H. S. Director Aylsone deLaveaga, daughter-in-law of Orinda pioneer and developer of the Village side, Edward deLaveaga, originated the idea of teaching the history of Orinda which was used.

Believing "You can't know where you are going if you don't know where you have been," Mrs. deLaveaga developed historical units in all subject areas in consultation with local teachers. Children were given a booklet which includes an explanation of how Orinda got its name, translations of street names, a landmarks map, and some famous Orinda people and places. Included were spelling and arithmetic games concerning local history.

Louis Stein generously shared his slides and reminiscences with all of the children at a large assembly. Children came dressed in costumes of any period of activity of Orinda history. They represented cavemen, Indians, Spanish and Mexicans, ranch hands, and the 1890's and 1920's.

The children drew pictures and stories of early life in Orinda. These will be displayed in the library, with each school shown for a full week. The source material will be shown in the history cabinet in the Bartle Memorial Alcove. We appreciate the cooperation of the school administration in this program.

## SPECIAL THANKS

We thank Mrs. Wahlander for her donation of newspaper articles on Victor Castro. We now have a copy of Volume I, Number 1 of The Orindan, thanks to Mrs. J. T. Gregory of the Lafayette Historical Society, to whom we are most grateful.

# LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor: Angela Broadhead, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette 94549

## "EARLY RANCHING" EXHIBIT IN LAFAYETTE

Before BART and the automobile, ranching was a way of life in Contra Costa. To help recreate this scene, the historical society has gathered together the gear and trappings of the typical working ranch at the turn of the century. Farm implements, worn and weathered with age, together with photographs of many of the prominent local ranches can now be seen at the Landmarks Room of the Lafayette Federal Savings and Loan, 3614 Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

On loan for this exhibit are a large wooden wheelbarrow, a brindle with blinders, tooled leather gauntlets, as well as handmade canvas chaps, an old pack saddle and saddle bags used in 1903. Pictures taken on the Bernal, Carroll, Moraga and Rowland ranches demonstrate the seasonal and varied activities that were all part of this rural period of history.

Another item of interest is a copy of an old land grant map showing Lafayette located on two Mexican land grants, the Rancho Acalanes and the Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados. A series of photos show the restoration of the venerable Moraga Adobe in 1942. The Adobe is located on the Moraga Ranch, one of the few remaining working ranches in 1973.

The historical society wishes to thank the following contributors: Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Breen, Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Burt, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Byers, Diamond K. Supply, Brother Dennis of St. Mary's College, the Moraga Historical Society, and Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Frazell.

## LAFAYETTE'S CENTURY-OLD BELL

When the old schoolhouse on Moraga Road was dedicated last May as a historic landmark, the bell in the old belfry was rung. Its silvery tone seemed especially significant which started us on a search of its history.

Just recently we have found that the bell is more than likely over 100 years old and rang out in the days of Elam Brown. It hung in the belfry of the Good Templars Hall which was built in the 1860's on a low hill just east of Plaza Park. Over the years the hall also served as a school and a Methodist church.

In the late 1920's the Good Templars Hall was torn down and the owner of the property, Clarence Brown (no relation of Elam), gave the bell to the Methodist Church. It still hangs in the belfry of the old schoolhouse which is part of the present church.

## DATE FOR FEBRUARY MEETING SET

Mrs. Joseph Gregory, Lafayette resident, will speak at the February meeting of the three societies on "Early California Costumes as Shown by Dolls."

We invite you to join us on Monday, February 4 at 8:00 p.m. More information will be given in the next issue of LOS RANCHOS.

MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Editor: Brother Dennis Box 103, Moraga 94556

## PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE - FROM RON STANLEY

It has been a great pleasure, an honor, and a wonderful experience to serve as president of the Moraga Historical Society during the year 1973.

We were unable to sponsor a Christmas Posada at this Yuletide but are planning to do so for the Christmas Season of 1974.

The Society welcomes the following new members whose names we will inscribe in the 1974 Roster: Mr. William Meder, Anna Marie Seplak, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Moreskine, and Miss Shirley Moreskine.

Dues for the new year are payable in January, and the schedule remains the same: Individuals, $5.00; Couples, $7.50; Students, $2.50.

Plan to attend the symposium our society is sponsoring. Come early to participate in the election of Directors for our Board which will precede the program. Nominated for the three-year terms are Mrs. Dorothy Bowen, Col. James Shigley, and Mr. Warren Miller. Nominations may be made from the floor for other candidates for this term as well as for one two-year term.

We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Don Manuel for the gift of an original adobe brick removed from the Joaquin Moraga structure so that it could be presented at the Society's Eighth Anniversary Banquet. Since it was cut from a full-size adobe in order to fit an inside corner pattern, it is only 15 inches long. However, a strip of rawhide intended as a binder, perhaps for the entire brick, protrudes 12 inches beyond the broken edge--and still bears the hair of the animal.

LOS RANCHOS / EL RANCHO

MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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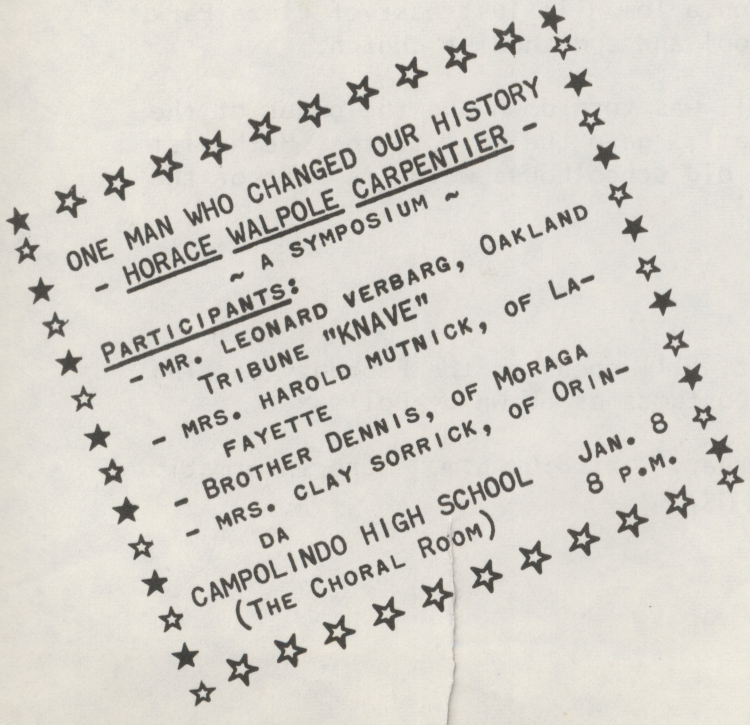
ONE MAN WHO CHANGED OUR HISTORY
- HORACE WALPOLE CARPENTIER -
~ A SYMPOSIUM ~
PARTICIPANTS:
- MR. LEONARD VERBARG, OAKLAND TRIBUNE "KNAVE"
- MRS. HAROLD MUTNICK, OF LAFAYETTE
- BROTHER DENNIS, OF MORAGA
- MRS. CLAY SORRICK, OF ORINDA
CAMPOLINDO HIGH SCHOOL
(THE CHORAL ROOM)
JAN. 8
8 P.M.

TIME VALUE

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Broadhead
965 Yorkshire Court
Lafayette, CA 94549